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CE 5150

**Final Project Reflection**

**Which of the NETS standards are demonstrated through this project, and to what level?**

**Creativity and Innovation**

a. Apply existing knowledge to generate new ideas, products, or processes.

b. Create original works as a means of personal or group expression.

**On the first point, the ‘existing knowledge’ in this case would be what the students learned throughout the introductory philosophy unit. Essentially, the expectation would be that after establishing a fair level of familiarity with these concepts, they would then be able to identify relevant problems and attempt to offer arguments that address these issues in a way that seeks to resolve the dilemma. There are multiple ways to do this, ranging from simply trying to find a logical solution to making the case that the difficulty is not actually as problematic as it would at first appear to be (usually done through analyzing the semantics of the question itself). Or, students may argue that the apparent challenge posed to a certain philosophy is reliant on false assumptions, unsound logic, and invalid reasoning.**

**Through the process of attempting to address their chosen problems, the students would be creating their own unique arguments and formulating new ideas. This isn’t to say that these ideas will always be purely original, but they will be unique in both how the students come to them (whether on their own or through a combination of discussion and research) and in how they choose to present them. On the latter point, both assembling an essay and then translating their main argument(s) into the medium of an online comic will require innovation in process and generate a new form of product. While students at this level would be familiar with writing essays (and possibly even with writing essays in the form of philosophical arguments) I believe that figuring out how to summarize and condense these essays to fit the format would pose a challenge to their ability to deconstruct their own writing as well as offer an opportunity to express it creatively in a visual format.**

**This leads to the second standard in this category. I think the notion that the comic allows for personal and group expression requires somewhat less justification. As stated in my plan, students can represent the main points of their argument in a variety of ways. They may simply choose to have characters having a conversation about the topic (a Socratic dialogue format) or present their ideas in the form of a narrative, story, poem, etc. While the essay bears the main burden of fleshing out the argument, the comic is really more of an opportunity to stretch creatively.**

**Communication and Collaboration**

b. Communicate information and ideas effectively to multiple audiences using a variety of media and formats.

d. Contribute to project teams to produce original works or solve problems.

**A central goal of this project is that students will be working on their ability to convey ideas accurately and effectively. ‘Multiple audiences’ in this case would be the instructor, their fellow classmates, and (on an individual level) the other group members. Given that the groups will have to come to a consensus about what they feel their argument will be and how they wish to present it, the individual members of the group will also have to work to communicate their ideas to one another. In terms of the variety of media and formats, these will consist mainly of the essay and the comic strips. To a lesser extent, group discussion and collaboration (whether face to face or through e-mail and other digital venues) could also qualify. However, while the students are required to work together outside of class time, the project is designed to allow for flexibility in terms of how they prefer to do so.**

**Once again, I feel that the second point here is more straightforward. The students will be working in small groups to create their own projects and solve their main philosophical problem (which in turn will probably give rise to many smaller issues to be addressed) as well as the logistical and academic problems that come with the research and analysis of the relevant issues. Additionally, as previously stated I believe that translating their arguments to comic form and creating a finished product are both areas that pose their own difficulties.**

**Research and Information Fluency**

a. Plan strategies to guide inquiry.

b. Locate, organize, analyze, evaluate, synthesize, and ethically use information from a variety of sources and media.

c. Evaluate and select information sources and digital tools based on the appropriateness to specific tasks.

**The planning phase of the project requires students to, first of all, decide upon a problem or issue which they find interesting and would like to tackle. Alternately, students may simply approach this by picking a philosopher or school of thought that they’d like to study in more depth and then find a debatable topic within the purview of these ideas. The research aspect of the project will also require a fair deal of planning, as the students will need to decide how they will approach the gathering of this information. They will have to decide upon where they wish to look, how they’d like to divvy up the work and compare results, and so on.**

**The second point is closely tied in with the first. The appropriate way to cite sources will be covered in class beforehand. Students are expected to adhere to citation guidelines and give credit where credit is due. Their research will also by its nature require them to be actively organizing, compiling, and analyzing the efficacy of arguments and then selectively determining which sources help to support their claims. Students aren’t expected to know the answer to their questions beforehand, so part of the purpose of the research project isn’t merely to build evidence but also to allow them to give deeper consideration to these issues. In synthesizing both sides of the argument into an intelligible debate, students may find that their initial opinions change. A variety of sources will be required for this process, although I’ll admit that this aspect of the standard isn’t met to the level that it could be given that there’s no requirement that students draw from different forms of media. As long as sources are properly cited, however, they may use online journals, websites, books, videos, and so on, as they choose.**

**While I may not have been as explicit on the final point, I do expect that students would demonstrate capable judgment in determining whether or not an information source is suitable to the support of their argument. While not all sources need qualify as scholarly (that would mostly limit them to drawing from articles published in peer-reviewed academic journals), they should at least meet the standard of being relevant and defensible. If students are presenting a side of the argument contrary to their own, then they should be attempting to give an accurate representation of this view even if in disagreement with it. (Not doing so would be a logical fallacy; the argument should stand or fall on its own merits and the points put forth by the students.)**

**Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, and Decision Making**

a. Identify and define authentic problems and significant questions for investigation.

b. Plan and manage activities to develop a solution or complete a project.

c. Collect and analyze data to identify solutions and/or make informed decisions.

d. Use multiple processes and diverse perspectives to explore alternative solutions.

**While I believe that the design of the project meets these guidelines, I do feel that a bit of clarification is required on my part. Namely, I can anticipate that some people might not see philosophical dilemmas as ‘real-world’ problems. In attempting to teach philosophy as something in which students can find themselves actively engaged, something which is applicable to our everyday lives and which can both help us to resolve problems on a variety of issues and challenge us to think more deeply about our own beliefs or view a topic from an alternate perspective, I do think that it identifies problems which are genuine and seeks to better understand and if possible solve them. Many questions in the field of ethics, for example, are framed in relation to current real-world issues. I therefore feel that if a theory is attempting to outline a rationale for moral decision-making, or approaching other problems like how to determine what standards a claim needs to meet to qualify as true knowledge, that it has concerned itself with authentic problems.**

**That being said, I feel that the standards of this category are covered through a combination of the philosophical study and reasoning required by the students as well as the more practical aspects of determining how to approach their research, construct an essay, and so on. As stated in the previous section, it’s also basically a requirement of trying to form a philosophical argument that the students (even if they begin the project feeling that they have a solution and are firmly correct in that belief) will have to look at the issue from multiple angles.**

**Digital Citizenship**

a. Advocate and practice safe, legal, and responsible use of information and technology.

b. Exhibit a positive attitude toward using technology that supports collaboration, learning, and productivity.

c. Demonstrate personal responsibility for lifelong learning.

d. Exhibit leadership for digital citizenship.

**I’m not going to dwell too long on this category- while my project may not meet these standards at their highest level in its design, I did include all four in my plan because I felt that they were at least partially represented. Additionally, even if not stated explicitly I do feel that these are governing principles which should generally apply to students working with technology regardless of the project criteria.**

**On the first point, it would be my intention in covering how to properly cite sources that I would be addressing concerns about the proper and legal ways to do this. Moreover, citation of one’s sources is a matter of personal responsibility since it requires that the individual researcher ensures that he or she is giving credit where it’s due regardless of whether this information is fact-checked. If an individual is contributing to the group’s body of data, they are taking individual responsibility for presenting any information that isn’t cited or referenced elsewhere as their own ideas. Proper citation also generally covers ethical and legal issues in the use of technology. (On the latter point, some sites and sources explicitly state that information shouldn’t be used either without permission or at least without proper citation.)**

**To take the remaining points in brief order, a positive attitude is something which I believe that an instructor should model for students in their own approach to demonstrating the technology. When students are encouraged to work collaboratively and productively by a teacher who demonstrates enthusiasm for the project and technology, I believe this helps them to develop a similar attitude. Also, by taking time to walk through the technology with the students (especially the research aspect in this case), the teacher is showing them just what opportunities are available to them in its utilization. I believe that by making students aware of their resources and showing them how to properly research topics that the instructor is helping them to assume personal responsibility for future learning. Once a student has learned how to do research through an academic database, for instance, they can no longer eschew responsibility for doing research on the grounds that they have no frame of reference.**

**Lastly, while this may be the standard met most lightly here, I do think that learning how to properly research and represent data- particularly when related to the solving of problems which may be socially or culturally relevant to society- helps students to develop as citizens in a digital world.**

**Technology Operations and Concepts**

a. Understand and use technology systems.

b. Select and use applications effectively and productively.

c. Troubleshoot systems and applications.

d. Transfer current knowledge to learning new technologies.

Again, these standards are met broadly but not necessarily in as robust a fashion as others. Students will have to familiarize themselves with technology systems (at minimum, the ability to navigate the school’s computer and online library resources) and to exhibit good decision-making skills in determining how to use these properly and effectively. In particular, the process of searching for useful sources requires an understanding of how to define search fields, narrow results, and cross-reference information. I included the third point because, while the project itself doesn’t require students to be dealing with a problem that’s technological in nature, each individual student group is going to have to collaborate outside of class and support one another in dealing with any technical difficulties or obstacles which arise. In short, they’re each others’ first point of contact for tech support. On the final point, students will be taking the knowledge with which they begin the project (that which they will have at the completion of the unit and after the review of topics that have been covered) and use this to help them learn how to properly navigate online research and organize information into a new medium.

**How would you expect this project to improve the proficiency (NETS) of your students (staff, co-workers)?**

Hopefully my responses to the NET-S were given in enough detail that I addressed the governing proficiencies while describing the ways in which I feel that individual standards were met. I’ll therefore use this section to quickly address the guiding principles of the NETS-T instead. (Since I mainly focused on the NET-S I’m not going to go into individual detail on every subcategory.)

**Facilitate and Inspire Student Learning and Creativity**

Given that my background is in philosophy, it’s probably pretty clear that I designed this project to draw upon my personal knowledge of that area. When building a project from scratch I generally try to start with points of familiarity. That speaks to my knowledge of the subject matter as well as my ability to teach it. I also attempted to scaffold the project in a way that takes into account the difficulties that students may have when approaching the study of philosophy, taking care to describe when additional support may be required. The structure of the activity itself could easily be adapted to suit other teachers and their respective strengths; the project need not deal specifically with the study of philosophy. I feel that questions of student creativity and innovation have already been addressed.

**Design and Develop Digital Age Learning Experiences and Assessments**

I don’t have quite as much to say on this category. I certainly believe that students would be engaged in an authentic learning experience, and part of the reason to have them assemble their argument in multiple forms was to allow individuals with different learning styles to approach the project in varying ways. In terms of assessment, I also feel that this allows a little more flexibility in gauging the students’ development over the course of the unit. As I generally feel that assessment is an ongoing process, the instructor has the opportunity to observe the students as they engage with one another and discuss their projects in addition to seeing their final products.

**Model Digital Age Work and Learning**

Again, I don’t plan to dwell too much on this point. Teachers do have to move with the times and helping students to focus their research efforts on digital sources is a large part of that. As more and more schools (and universities in particular) make the transition from paper media to information databases it becomes more of a necessity for students to avail themselves of online sources.

**Promote and Model Digital Citizenship and Responsibility**

In a sense, I’ve already addressed this in terms of the teacher taking care to positively and enthusiastically demonstrate the technology and model how it can be used. A discussion of proper citation practices also contributes to this proficiency.

**Engage in Professional Growth and Leadership**

Here I’m going to speak on a more personal note. While I applaud (and am indeed somewhat envious) the efforts of my fellow students throughout this class, I often felt that my own abilities were severely lacking in comparison. Where one person could produce a multimedia extravaganza for a video project, I struggled with creating and posting a simple short video clip. I understand that the project plan which I’ve outlined isn’t the most ambitious lesson and activity in terms of how it undertakes and integrates different forms of technology. However, I didn’t want to incorporate anything with which I didn’t feel that I had a solid familiarity, as it would be difficult to defend that position in a summary analysis of my project. While I do believe my lesson requires both the students and the instructor to make use of digital tools and resources, I moreover want to state that over the course of this particular project I feel that I’ve personally been challenged in this regard and had to grow as a result. That may be more of a meta-level reflection but I felt that it was worth mentioning.

**What is the rationale for supporting a media literate classroom environment?**

Taking this question to mean what my personal rationale would be, the main drive that I see for doing this is to engage students. When I first had the opportunity to teach, I was surprised to find that with few exceptions the instructors in the department had taken to making regular use of PowerPoint presentations to structure their lectures. As both a grad student and a T.A., I was able to observe the effects of integrating this technology into the classroom both from the perspective of someone taking a class and as someone observing how students reacted to such an environment. The level of engagement of the students was dramatically different in many cases when compared to instructors who continued to take a traditional ‘stand and lecture’ approach and convinced me early on that teachers had to not just present material but be able to do so through different media. I should state that it’s been some years since I was a T.A. and that my horizons were still admittedly pretty narrow then in terms of the technology that I might consider approachable. However, I do still feel that integrating technology with one’s lesson plans and allowing students to express themselves through technology with which they feel familiar are both ways to keep the classroom engaging and relevant.

Additionally, while this may be looking far down the road, many students will be expected to have familiarity with different types of technology and media in their professional careers. In a sense our educational system is a bit behind the times in this regard. We might still have home economics or shop classes (which teach students skills that were once considered to be essential to their later adult lives) but many places don’t have classes that teach technology-related life skills as part of their core curriculum. For this reason, it’s up to educators to try and integrate media literacy into part of their individual curriculums where and when they can do so.

**How does the use of digital multimedia enhance communication?**

There are so many ways in which this applies, and I don’t want to start rattling down a list of applications. To try and give an overview, I’d say that the use of digital multimedia allows us to communicate quickly, efficiently, and through formats that may be better suited to the ideas that we want to establish. There are some ideas that simply can’t be established or developed very well for the audience without representing them in visual or auditory forms. These can range from videos to podcasts to web pages that create photo and audio collages. Various multimedia also facilitate communication in that if one method of collaboration is impractical or ineffective for someone then there are usually various other ones which they can use. Not everyone can communicate in real-time and sync their schedules and therefore may prefer to post in a forum or use a shared online document. Other people may prefer to work in real-time but only want to do so face-to-face through video chats.

Moreover, in a globalized, digitalized society, an aspiring learner has a wealth of information at his or her fingertips. Knowledge is no longer necessarily limited to select experts and people can not only seek to learn new information and skills but also assist others in doing so more easily. Even if someone doesn’t have firsthand knowledge they can often direct others to a better digital source. On a related note, digital multimedia also allows for us to present information in ways that may be better suited to the learning style of one type of person over another.

**How does the use of digital multimedia resources inspire and engage all learners?**

This seems like something of a capstone question to which everything so far has built. To approach this as my concluding statement, I’d say that these resources are inspirational in the wealth of opportunities that they open up to both students and educators and engaging in their potential to capture and hold an audience’s or creator’s attention in a variety of ways. Educators are, after all, learners in our own right. Just seeing what one could potentially do with a particular medium can inspire a person to rethink the entire structure of a lesson. For many learners in general, the greatest asses of these digital resources are their ability to turn learning from a passive exercise into an interactive one. More is required of the learner, but the tradeoff is that more freedom is available to them as well. Digital multimedia resources help to better make everyday life a constant educational environment where the learner is free to determine their level of participation and area of interest.

**Sources:**

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